NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

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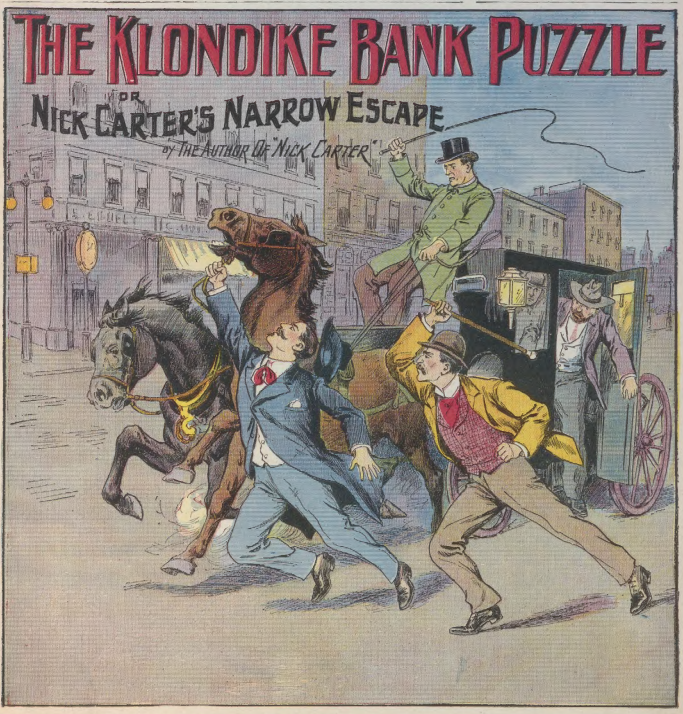
THE KLONDIKE BANK PUZZLE

OR NICK CARTER'S NARROW ESCAPE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."



As Nick Carter seized the bit of one of the bridles, he received a stunning blow on the back of his head from a heavy cane in the grasp of one of the men who had dashed forward.

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THE KLONDIKE BANK PUZZLE:

OR,

NICK CARTER'S NARROW ESCAPE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CIPHER BANK DRAFT.

A closed carriage drew up before the door of the Klondike Bank, in New York City, and a tall, dignified, handsome man stepped from it to the pavement. After a word to the driver, he passed through the doors and disappeared inside the bank.

This happened at fifteen minutes before three o'clock in the afternoon—only a few minutes before the time for the bank to close its doors for the day.

Twenty minutes later, or five minutes past the closing hour, he came out again, and when he did so the president of the bank, Peyton Boynton, accompanied him to the door and shook hands cordially with him at parting.

"It has given me great pleasure to oblige you, Mr. Moore," he said to the tall man, as they were parting. "I sincerely hope that when you return to New York you will make our bank your headquarters."

"Thank you, Mr. Boynton. I will certainly do so," replied the tall stranger genially.

"You expect to be absent some time, I suppose?"

"The period of my stay is rather indefinite—at least, it is so just at present; but I will call upon you as soon as I return."

And so they parted, the president to return to the interior of the bank, where there were still a few duties for him to perform, and the stranger, upon whose card was engraved the name Braxton Moore, to reenter his carriage and drive rapidly away.

When President Boynton returned to his desk, he picked up an open letter that was there, and read it through twice, and all the time with a half-satisfied smile on his lips and in his eyes.

The letter was as follows:

"NOME, Alaska, July 4, 1905.

"MY DEAR BOYNTON: I have already written you twice through the mails concerning my friend, Braxton Moore, and now I give him this letter to deliver to you in person. I wish you to regard it as a supplement to the others, and also as perfect a medium of identification as it is possible to supply from this distance. I enclosed

a photograph of Moore in my first letter to you about him, and in the second one I enclosed a letter written by him to me some time ago, which contains a very good original signature by him. I mention these facts in this letter, not because I suppose you have forgotten them, but as a further means of security for you in the matter of identification.

"Moore is the second son of the Earl of Cranleigh, and as such, as well as because of the influence he can swing on the other side, should receive your highest consideration. He goes from here direct to you, and after that he will sail as soon as possible for his own home in England, where he is to carry out the commissions I have given him.

"You may know something of the Earl of Cranleigh, his father. I believe he is regarded as the wealthiest titled personage in England.

"For the rest, he will explain matters fully to you, and I wish you to afford him every facility in your power or at your command for furthering what he is to do.

"He takes with him, to present to you for payment, my draft on you for the sum of $EEIRLD—I mention the sum in our private cipher for obvious reasons—which I desire you to pay at once, and in cash, without question.

"I am quite well aware of the fact that this is a somewhat irregular proceeding, but from this great distance it is the best that I can do, and after all, with all the precautions I have taken, I think there can be no mistake, even if an accident should happen to him on the way, and this letter should fall into alien hands. With his signature and his picture, both of which are already in your possession, you can make no mistake.

"You may look for me in New York about Christmastime, for I shall remain here at my post just as long as it is possible to do so, and will be one of the last to leave for the States.

"I certainly do long to see dear old New York again, but until I do, believe me

"Most sincerely yours,

"JACOB HAWKINS."

The "Jacob Hawkins" signature would have been almost unreadable to a stranger, but to the banker it was perfectly legible, for he had been accustomed to seeing it ever since the organization of the Bank of the Klondike in New York City.

Peyton Boynton had received the two other letters mentioned in this one. The first one had contained the photograph, and the second, the signature. To-day he had seen the man himself who was mentioned in all these letters, and he had also seen him write his signature.

And he had readily paid out in cash to the stranger that mysterious sum of money which was represented by the letters, $EEIRLD.

The use of this cipher alone would almost have convinced Peyton Boynton of the genuineness of the letter that was brought to him, for it was a cipher that had only been used between himself and Hawkins. He was positive in his own mind that it was unknown to any third party.

Moreover, he had permitted himself to be convinced of everything within the space of a few minutes. He had received the stranger, read the letter he presented, and he had cashed the draft all in the twenty minutes that elapsed while Braxton Moore was in the bank.

And he was well pleased with himself, too. Well satisfied with what he had done.

During those twenty minutes, Braxton Moore had found time to speak largely and pleasingly of his father the earl, of his brother who would some day succeed to the title, of the great opportunities they all had in reference to their mutual interests with Hawkins, in the Klondike, and of the certainty that he would speedily secure the unqualified backing of his distinguished father in all their schemes.

And now he had gone.

He had apologized handsomely for his haste, but the *Celtic* was to sail that afternoon, and it was imperative that he should catch it; and the captain, in person, had kindly assured him over the telephone not an hour ago that he would hold the ship fifteen minutes for the son of the Earl of Cranleigh.

And there you are.

It was all done. All attended to.

Braxton Moore would have been detained several days in New York had it been made impossible for him to catch the great *Celtic* by reason of any red tape in their proceedings.

And to obviate the possibility of such a thing, Braxton Moore had taken other precautions.

For one thing he had wired Peyton Boynton from Chicago that he was on his way to New York with a personal letter from Hawkins—and incidentally with a draft for EEIRLD dollars.

Still later he had wired, en route, that he could not reach the bank until almost the closing hour, and that the *Celtic* sailed the same day at three. He wished to sail on the *Celtic* if such a thing could be made possible.

And so, he had appeared at the bank at fifteen minutes before three; he had presented his credentials to the president; he had cashed his draft; he had driven away, and he was gone.

Boynton had taken extreme care to have everything in readiness for his expected caller, and as we have seen, there had not been the least delay.

Boynton congratulated himself on this fact; he was given to congratulating himself on occasion when he felt that he had acted with unusual acumen and despatch.

Those three letters mentioned already—the two through the mails and the one presented in person—were by no means the only ones in which Jacob Hawkins had referred to his friend, Braxton Moore, the second son of the Earl of Cranleigh.

Nearly every letter that had been received from Hawkins since he went to that far-away place in the interests of the syndicate of which he was himself the head, had

contained some mention of the brilliant young Englishman for whom he had conceived such a friendship.

Boynton could, in fact, recall the very first mention that had been made of him; he could recall it almost word for word, he thought; and as he recalled it, it was as follows:

"I have made the acquaintance of a fine young chap here. He is the second son of the old Earl of Cranleigh. We both know who *he* is. Braxton Moore—Moore is the family name, you know—is a fine fellow. He is also a skilled engineer and a first-class mineralogist. I have already made him a proposition to take him in with us, and he has written home about it. If we can succeed in getting the interests of the old earl with us—well, you know what that will mean, Boynton."

That was the substance of it as Boynton recalled it without taking the trouble to look up the letter itself.

And after that, at long intervals, there were other letters, also, mentioning Braxton Moore.

And then had come the one containing the photograph, and the other one containing the letter with the signature.

Boynton let his eyes wander out through the bank, where the bookkeepers were still hard at work, and where the business of the day was being wound up as rapidly as possible.

He felt an unusual sense of complacency as he did so.

He knew something about this magnificent property in which he and Jacob Hawkins, with others, were interested.

Development was all that was required to make it the richest in the Klondike, and he believed that now, with the millions of the old earl to back them—and he felt that they were as good as secured—he and his associates would go on piling up the millions for themselves into untold quantities.

It was a mere matter of expediency, he told himself, whether they should stop at a hundred millions, five hundred millions, or a thousand millions.

It was all there. He was positive of that. There was nothing to do but to take it out, and what he wished to do was to take it out on a large scale; take it out with a big hand; produce it in a way that gold had never before been produced.

He felt that they would one day make the DeBeers diamond-fields in South Africa look like thirty cents. He could see the Bank of the Klondike, of which he was the president, assuming the lead among all the great banks of New York.

It was power that Boynton wanted—the power that money gives; and he knew that that power lay concealed only a few feet under the soil up there in the Klondike, and that all that was necessary was to dig it out.

Braxton Moore and Braxton Moore's father were the men to make that possible.

There could be no picks and shovels so efficacious as their millions—and, incidentally, there could happen nothing which would do the Bank of the Klondike so much immediate good as to have it rumored, and then known, in "the street," that the Earl of Cranleigh was behind it.

He rubbed his hands together unctuously.

Then he took his top-coat from its peg and threw it over his arm. He donned his shining silken hat, and grasped his cane.

With a last glance around his private office to see that everything was secure, he passed through the doorway into the corridor, and so toward the street door, nodding a good day to many of the clerks as he passed them.

At the street door he spoke for a moment with the special officer in charge of it—and then he passed out upon the street and turned toward Broadway.

He had taken perhaps thirty steps in that direction when he came to a full stop and gasped for breath, clutching the railing at his side for support as he did so.

Facing him—approaching him at a rapid walk—coming down the street toward him, with a broad smile of greeting shining on his sun-browned face, was Jacob Hawkins.

CHAPTER II.

BRAXTON MOORE'S DOUBLE.

It has been said that there are occasions when a man can live a lifetime in a moment, and if we accept that statement in the light of a metaphor, there can be no doubt of its truth.

Peyton Boynton always believed that he lived through one lifetime in about two seconds that day.

It came home to him instantly that he had been duped.

In that less than one second of time during which he grasped the railing for support, and before he rushed forward to greet his friend and associate, he realized that he had been made the victim of a clever rascal who had succeeded in his designs all too well—and he as instantly resolved to keep the matter to himself, at least for the immediate present.

He knew that he must first discover the real "lay of the land" before he unbosomed himself and admitted that he had been an "easy mark."

So quickly did he recover himself that Hawkins barely noticed the momentary excitement that had possessed him; although notice it he did as a matter of fact; and he spoke of it, too.

"My dear Hawkins!" exclaimed Boynton, rushing forward with extended hand. "Where in the world did you drop from? You are certainly the very last man that I expected to-day."

"How is that?" replied Hawkins. "Didn't you get my

letters? And didn't you receive my wire? I telegraphed you from Buffalo that I would be here at four o'clock this afternoon."

"Did you? It must have escaped my notice, somehow. I have been out part of the day—and rather preoccupied. How are you?"

"Fine as silk. I say, Peyton, what was the matter with you just now? I thought you were going to faint away when you saw me."

"I did, too, to tell you the truth. It was the shock of seeing you, I suppose. You just got in town, eh?"

"Yes. Sent my grip to the club, and walked here from the ferry. Gee! but it feels good to have the pavements of old New York under my feet again."

"I suppose so. Will you go to the bank, or——"

"No; now that I have found you outside, we might as well go to the club. What is the matter with you? Aren't you well? You are as white as a sheet."

"To tell you the truth, I haven't been very well to-day. But it is nothing. I suppose you came straight through, eh?"

"Sure. I'm straight from Alaska—as straight as I could come. I haven't stopped a minute anywhere, more than was necessary."

"And everything is all right up there? Eh, Jake?"

"Fine as silk. Couldn't be better."

They had turned about now and were walking side by side toward Broadway and the subway.

"I suppose, Peyton, you remember my frequent mention of the young Englishman, don't you?"

"You refer to the son of the Earl of Cranleigh, I suppose?" murmured Boynton, in reply.

"Certainly. Braxton Moore."

"What about him?"

"Nothing—only that I have brought him back with me."

"Indeed. Where is he? Why didn't you bring him along with you now?"

"Well, I thought I could make the presentation rather better after I had told you that he is here. You don't like to have people sprung upon you, I remember."

"Where is he?"

"I sent him to the club with the grips. Tell you what, Peyton, he's a fine chap."

"He certainly is a handsome fellow," replied Boynton, before he thought.

"What? Have you seen him? Do you know him?"

"Only his picture—his photograph, you know."

"Is that so? Where did you dig that up?"

"Why, you—er—let me see. Where was it that I saw it? Oh, yes; it was in one of the Sunday papers not long ago, together with one of his father and the whole da—that is, the whole family, you know."

"He is a handsome fellow, and no mistake—and a smart one, too. But that isn't the point so much as something else that concerns us."

"No? What is the something else, then?"

"His father's millions."

"Oh, yes. I believe you have mentioned something about that in your letters."

"What's that? I have never mentioned the subject to you in my life. What the deuce do you mean?"

"I was thinking for the moment that you had done so."

"Look here, Peyton, you're sick, aren't you?"

"I am a little off color, that's a fact. I think seeing you so suddenly rather knocked me out."

"I should suppose that a banker would get used to surprises."

"As a matter of fact, they should do so, Jake. I have certainly had one to-day."

"You mean in seeing me. It's odd that you didn't get that wire."

"So it is. I must inquire into that in the morning. You sent it from Buffalo, you say?"

"Yes; I sent one from Chicago, too, yesterday. Of course you received that one."

"Of course."

"Then what in blazes knocked you out so when you saw me to-day?"

"Just pure, unadulterated joy, I expect. Nothing else. You know, Jake, this has been rather a trying day in the street, and to tell you the truth I had plumb forgotten that you were coming."

"Humph! What you need is a season in the Klondike. That would put the nerve into you."

"I hope to try the remedy some day—when we have made our hundred millions."

"Millions? There are billions there, Peyton. All you've got to do is to uncover them. I tell you what, it looks dead easy."

"It's like planting potatoes to raise potatoes, isn't it? You have to plant a million in the soil up there, and after a little while you take out a lot more. Isn't that the idea?"

"Something very much like it; only that we won't have to plant millions, you know; a few hundred thousands will do the act."

"I thought you said that you wanted the earl's millions."

"Did I say that?"

"I thought you did."

"Well, let it go at that. We do want his backing. We do want a company with millions behind it, if we can get it. And Braxton Moore is the man to do that for us. By the way, how are the affairs of the bank? All right?"

"Yes; of course. You know that we have to run a little close to keep up our end, but we are decidedly on top so far."

"That's good. I shall want you to get me a couple of hundred thousand to-morrow, Peyton."

"Really? What for?"

"For Moore. I owe it to him as a matter of fact; and he wants to sail for home to-morrow."

"So? On what steamer?"

"*Fürst Bismark*, I think; or the *Kronprintz*, I forget which. It's North German Lloyd, anyhow. That is his favorite line."

While they were talking they had taken the subway at Wall Street and had been whisked speedily up-town, and now they left the train and made their way through a side street toward the club-house where both—for they were bachelors—had been in the habit of making their home.

And presently they entered the club, where Hawkins was told that his friend had already preceded him, and had already been assigned to a room.

"Come right along up," said Hawkins. "We will find him in the throes of unpacking, but he won't in the least mind our breaking in upon him; and I want you two to meet at once."

"No," said Boynton, "I'll wait down here if you don't mind. I would rather meet him here in the parlors than up there. You go ahead and I'll wait here for you."

Hawkins left him then, and Boynton, being alone, wiped the perspiration from his brow and then strode across the room and looked at himself in the mirror.

"You idiot!" he muttered, shaking his fist at the reflection, for he happened to be alone in the room; and after a moment he added:

"I've got to make a clean breast of this thing, too; and it must be done before I sleep to-night. *Two hundred and twenty-five thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars!* That is what I paid out to that infernal scoundrel. Pretty close to a quarter of a million. It is a wonder that I didn't faint dead away when I saw Hawkins.

"I wonder if this chap up-stairs looks anything like the fellow that got the money?"

He crossed to a table in one corner and ordered himself a drink; then he lighted a cigar and pretended to read a paper while he waited for his friend to return.

But there was very little that he saw on the pages of the paper. He was thinking all the time of that two hundred and twenty-five thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars that he had given away that afternoon.

It was more than he could spare; more than the bank could spare; he really was face to face with a crisis—and it was a crisis which might cost him all of that bright future which had appeared so roseate to him a moment before he encountered Hawkins in the street.

"There is one thing dead certain," he muttered to himself, "and that is that the fellow who got that money did not sail on the *Celtic*. I only wish he had done so. It would be a cinch to catch him then.

"But he would be far too wise for that—far too wise.

"I must excuse myself from these chaps just as soon as I can, and I must find Nick Carter. He is the only man who can help me out of this tangle; but first I must see the real Braxton Moore."

As if in answer to his wish, he saw Hawkins approaching him at that moment—and he gasped again in astonishment at sight of the man who was with him, for as far as appearances could determine at that distance, it was the same man who had received the cash from his own hands that afternoon.

The same in stature; the same in physique; the same in general appearance. There was the same drooping, blond mustache, the same lofty brow, the same deep-blue eyes—the same everything save in dress.

And, no—there was another thing that was different. Boynton noticed it as this man came nearer.

Braxton Moore was a much younger man than the impostor.

Boynton had noticed at the bank that the man to whom he paid the money possessed many gray hairs mixed with his blond hair; he had noticed certain lines about the face and neck which are the product of years alone, and which youth never possesses. Lines which begin to make their appearance at forty, but rarely before that age.

This man who stood before him now did not have those lines, nor the gray hairs.

There was a difference, too, in the expression of the eyes—that difference which youth imparts, and which uprightness and honesty makes manifest.

He had not thought of it at the time, but he remembered now, too late, that the impostor had not looked at him very straight; or, yes, he had, too, but he had not looked at him in just the same way that the real Braxton Moore did it.

"You have come all the way from the Klondike together, I suppose?" he asked, after they had shaken hands and were seated at the table together.

"All the way together?" laughed Hawkins. "Bless your soul! we have been together for many moons. We have slept under the same blanket, so to speak, although, as a matter of fact, I think we never really did that but once."

"Your face seems very familiar to me, Mr. Moore," said Boynton. "I wonder if it is possible that you have a double anywhere in the world? A double who is somewhat older than you are?"

"A double? I don't know. All the Moores look alike—that is, *our* Moores. My brother and I are alike, only of course he is older, you know."

"Yes; certainly," replied Boynton lamely.

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER ACCEPTS THE CASE.

"You are Mr. Carter, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am Nick Carter."

"I have heard a great deal about you, Mr. Carter, but I don't think I ever had the pleasure of meeting you before."

Nick glanced at the card which he still held in his hand; then he said:

"In what way can I be of service, Mr. Boynton?"

"I have been robbed, to-day, of two hundred and twenty-five thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars," replied Boynton laconically.

The two were seated together in Nick Carter's study, Boynton having just called. It was now half-past eight o'clock in the evening.

"Indeed!" said the detective, in response to the statement. "That is quite a tidy sum to lose all at once. Were you carrying that much in your pocket, and was it picked?"

"No; worse luck! I gave it away."

"Gave it away?"

"Well, that is about the size of it. In plain English, I was fooled out of it."

"Well," said Nick Carter, smiling, "there is one consolation—if you can find any consolation in it—you are not the first and only man who has been fooled out of money. How was it done?"

"It will require rather a long story to put you in possession of all the facts."

"Never mind, give it to me. I certainly want *all* the facts if I have any."

"I suppose, Mr. Carter, that you are not unfamiliar with the name of Jacob Hawkins?"

"No. I happen to have a slight acquaintance with the gentleman. In the Klondike at present, isn't he?"

"He returned to-day; this afternoon, in fact."

"Yes? Well? He isn't the man who fooled you out of it, is he?"

"Certainly not. He is my partner."

"Not in the banking business?"

"Yes; in that, too. He controls the stock of the bank where I am president. But that is not the point."

"What is the point?"

"Hawkins has been in the Klondike two years. He did not come out last winter, you know."

"I didn't know; but that makes no difference."

"You must be patient with me, Mr. Carter, if I seem to wander from the subject, but believe me, it all has to do with the robbery."

"Tell it in your own way, Mr. Boynton."

"Hawkins and I have organized a syndicate for taking up claims, and purchasing claims in the Klondike region, and we have some magnificent ones at that."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Shortly after he went there, he began to write to me about a young Englishman he had met there—a younger son of the Earl of Cranleigh; by name, Braxton Moore."

"Yes?"

"There was never a letter in which he did not have something to say about the excellence of that young man, who is a mineralogist, an engineer, and several other things as well. Hawkins sang his praises over and over again, until I think I really should have missed the chap if Hawkins had forgotten or neglected to mention him."

"No doubt. We grow to look for such things, you know."

"Then there came a letter in which Hawkins informed me that the two of them were going on a long trip into the interior, and that I need not expect another letter for a long time."

"That is quite a usual thing up there, isn't it?"

"Yes. All the same, it wasn't a month before I received another letter in which he made no mention of the trip, but in which he did enclose a photograph of Braxton Moore."

"Taken there, in Alaska, of course?"

"Apparently. I couldn't say as to that. It is evidently a snap-shot picture."

"Well?"

"In the course of a month or six weeks more came another letter in which he enclosed a letter that had been written to him at some time, by the man Moore, and which of course had his signature appended to it."

"I am beginning now to understand."

"That was intended to make me familiar with his signature as well as his face."

"Certainly."

"In that letter he stated that he was about ready to return to the States, but that it was barely possible that he might send Moore out ahead of him, and that in case he did so, he would provide Moore with a letter of introduction to me."

"And Moore arrived, I suppose; eh?"

"Moore did arrive. He very much arrived; heap arrived, as Lo, the poor Indian, might say. He arrived to the tune of two hundred and twenty-five thou——"

"Yes; I remember the amount."

"Well, early yesterday I received a wire from Chicago, signed Braxton Moore, which said that he would arrive in New York to-day shortly before three o'clock, and that he wished to sail for Europe on the *Celtic*, which was scheduled to sail at three. The wire also stated that he bore a personal letter from Hawkins to me, and also a draft on me for the sum of 'E-E-I-R-L-D' dollars."

"And that, I suppose, is the sum you have mentioned, expressed in a cipher supposed to be known only to you and Hawkins?"

"Precisely."

"Well, to make a long story short, he appeared at the bank at a quarter to three—just before the closing hour."

"That, you know, is the favorite hour for this sort of work."

"You seem to understand already what happened."

"I think I do. I believe that I could make a very close guess as to what happened."

"Suppose you try. It will relieve me."

"Probably he appeared at the bank in a great hurry. He told you that the ship was to sail at three, but that he had managed to communicate with the captain, who had consented to hold the ship fifteen or twenty minutes for him. He——"

"You are dead right, Mr. Carter, for that is exactly what he did say. He made me believe that he had talked with the captain over the telephone, and that because his father, the earl, happens to be a large stockholder in the company, the captain had readily consented to hold the ship a few minutes."

"And you believed it?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I?"

"I have never regarded bankers as overcredulous people."

"I was, all right."

"He brought the letter?"

"Yes."

"And the draft, of course, since you paid it."

"Yes."

"Have you the letter with you?"

"No; I left it at the bank; but I can tell you its contents."

"It is hardly necessary. I can guess what it said. It reminded you of the two letters you had received, one of which contained the picture and the other the signature, and it went into other particulars about what this young man could do for your affairs as soon as he reached the other side."

"You seem to be something of a wizard, Mr. Carter."

"Not at all. I am familiar, however, with the methods of these fellows. You paid the money at once?"

"Certainly. Without any hesitation whatever."

"And you purposely had it ready for him, so that he might not be delayed."

"I had."

"And probably you walked to the door with him when he took his departure, to say good-by, didn't you?"

"I did that, too."

"Did you give him the money in currency?"

"I did."

"And kept no record of the number of the bills, or nothing by which they could be traced, did you?"

"Not a thing."

"And then, I suppose, right on top of his departure, your friend Hawkins put in an appearance, you say?"

"I'll tell you about that. After the man whom I supposed to be Braxton Moore had gone, I sat for some time in my private office, smoking a cigar and thinking of the bright outlook we had for our venture in the north. It was about a quarter of four, I think, when at last I decided to go. I put on my hat and carried my top-coat over my arm, and having said good night to the clerks, I passed out of the bank.

"Carter, I hadn't gone three rods before I met Jacob Hawkins face to face, and you might easily have knocked me down with a puffball, then and there."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I realized instantly that I had been duped."

"Of course."

"Hawkins had just come from the train. He had left his friend at the station—that is, he had sent him to the club, while he himself walked to the bank to see me, because he had telegraphed me from Buffalo that he would be there at four o'clock."

"What did you do when you saw Hawkins?"

"I almost fainted away."

"I didn't ask you what you almost did. What did you *do?*"

"I braced up like a little major and faced the music."

"Do you mean that you told Hawkins what had happened?"

"I mean that I did nothing of the sort. I didn't peep. He saw something in my face, however, and asked me what was the matter. I told him it was the shock of seeing him so suddenly, and then he asked me if I had not received his wire."

"So Hawkins does not know as yet that you have lost the money?"

"I haven't told a soul until this moment. Now, Hawkins says that he wired me from Buffalo and from Chicago. How do you suppose it happens that I never received those messages?"

"They were probably intercepted."

"By whom, and how?"

"By the people who were engaged in robbing you. As to how it was done, we cannot tell that as yet."

"And then there are those letters."

"Yes."

"I never saw such perfect forgeries. Still more than that, they were mailed at Nome. Now that fellow must have come down here directly from there. He must have known the whole game of ours from A to Z; don't you think so?"

"It certainly looks that way."

"Mr. Carter, do you think there is any show in the world for us to find that chap?"

"Possibly. I can answer that question better when I have heard all your story."

"Well, that's about all of it."

"Not quite. You have been passing a part of the evening with Hawkins, haven't you?"

"Certainly."

"And his young friend, Braxton Moore?"

"Yes."

"Tell me something about them, won't you?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL.

"The most astounding thing about the whole thing that I have to tell, is the fact that the impostor, whom I saw, and the real Braxton Moore, who is now at the club with Hawkins, are almost exactly alike."

"You mean that they look alike?"

"Precisely; that is, almost. The man who called upon me and who got the money is at least ten years older than the man who is with Hawkins."

"And how has it occurred to you to account for that?"

"It hasn't occurred to me to account for it at all. I have to ask you to do that for me, if you will."

"I suppose you have already asked the young man who is with Hawkins if he has a double?"

"You really seem to know almost everything I have said. I did ask him that very question while we were at the club."

"And what reply did he make to it?"

"He said he didn't know; that all the Moores looked alike—or something to that effect."

"Anything else?"

"He said that he and his brother, Lord Byron Moore, were very much alike, 'although of course my brother is very much older than I.'"

"Humph!"

"You don't suppose that his brother, the lord, would have done such a thing, do you?"

"On the face of it, I should say not. Still, one cannot always tell, you know."

"Well, that's the case as it stands. Now what are we to do about it?"

"I don't suppose it has occurred to you to use the wireless telegraph to the *Celtic* to discover if there is such an individual as you describe aboard of her, has it?"

"No; to tell you the truth, it has not."

"Just wait till I use the telephone a few moments. I'll ask police headquarters to do that for us——"

"I don't want any publicity about this, if it can be avoided, Mr. Carter."

"All right. Wait where you are a moment."

The detective went out of the room to send the message, although there was an instrument on the desk where he had been seated; but after a little he returned and resumed his chair.

"You don't really suppose that there is any likelihood that the thief is aboard of that ship, do you?" asked Boynton, then.

"No; I do not. And yet it is just as well to cover *all* the ground as we go over it."

"How did you describe the man in your message? I have really given you no description of him as yet."

"I did not need one."

"Why not?"

"It so happens that I know Lord Byron Moore very well indeed by sight. I have seen him several times. What you said to me about the resemblance between him and his brother, and in regard to the resemblance between the man who robbed you and either of them, was quite sufficient."

"And the wireless will reach the ship all right, eh?"

"I think so."

"Mr. Carter, I want to get back that money if possible."

"Naturally."

"But even more than that, I want to get my clutches on the man who robbed me."

"I can understand that desire, also."

"Do you think we can do it?"

"We can at least try. And now, if you don't mind, I would like to ask *you* a few questions. You have done all the questioning so far. I think it is my turn."

"I am overanxious, and nervous, I suppose."

"It is not surprising, Mr. Boynton. Is your friend, Mr. Hawkins, a rich man?"

"Why, really, I don't know what he is worth. I have always supposed him to be a millionaire, although I have an idea that his holdings are pretty well tied up."

"You stated that he controls your bank, I believe?"

"Yes."

"What proportion of that stock do you hold?"

"I don't see what that has to do with the case in hand, if you will permit me to say so, Mr. Carter."

"It may have nothing to do with it. Do you recall the fact that I just now sent a message to the *Celtic* at sea, and that while we have not the least idea that our man is aboard of her?"

"I do."

"And did I not say that I believed in covering all the ground as I passed it?"

"Yes."

"That is what I am doing when I ask these questions. What proportion of the bank-stock do you hold?"

"One-quarter of it."

"And Hawkins has one share more than one-half?"

"No; he has a share more than a quarter, and he is trustee for another quarter."

"I see. You are interested together in this affair of the Klondike, are you?"

"Yes."

"Equally?"

"Exactly."

"And what is the position assumed by this young Braxton Moore?"

"I haven't had enough talk with Hawkins yet, to reply understandingly to that question."

"Well, you may assume what it is—no?"

"The substance of it is that Hawkins wants Moore to interest his father, the earl, in the property, and to induce him to back it with his great fortune."

"I see—I see."

"Perhaps, Mr. Carter, you would like to return with me to the club and make the acquaintance of Hawkins and Moore. They are there. I only made an excuse to come out for awhile. I did not tell them where I was going or what my business was."

"I think I would like to do that—a little later. But first, I would like to do something else."

"What is it?"

"I would like you to take me down to the bank with you—now."

"What! Now? At this hour of the night?"

"Yes. Your night watchman is there, isn't he?"

"Certainly."

"And he knows you?"

"Of course."

"You will have no difficulty in getting into your own private office, will you?"

"None whatever, of course."

"In that case I would like to go there—now."

"But why?"

"I wish particularly to see that correspondence."

"Oh! Those forged letters, eh?"

"The forged ones—and the real ones. They are in your desk, are they not?"

"Yes."

"I want to see them before I do anything else on this case. I will telephone to the central office, and have a man sent down from there to meet us at the bank. In that way there will be no report made of our presence there. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Shall we go, then?"

"Yes."

A half-hour later saw Nick Carter seated at the banker's desk, in his private office at the bank, poring over a bundle of letters which Boynton produced for him.

And he read them all carefully, from beginning to end. He compared them. He compared the texture of the paper on which they were written, and at last, after an hour spent in the study of them, he gave them back to the banker with a mere "Thank you."

"What do you make of them?" asked Boynton.

"Exactly what you made of them."

"You mean that it is not strange that I was fooled?"

"I don't think it at all strange that you were fooled, Mr. Boynton. Will you walk with me now as far the Western Union Building?"

"Certainly. Are you going to look up those telegrams?"

"It occurred to me that it might be well to make a few inquiries about them. I am acquainted with the night superintendent there. He will facilitate me in my inquiries."

"But the messages, you know, might have been sent by the Postal."

"We will walk on up to the Postal offices after we have been to the Western Union."

"And after that will you go to the club?"

"After that we will return to my house for a moment, and *then* we will go to the club."

"Oh, all right. You are full of mysteries, Mr. Carter."

When they arrived at the Western Union Building, Nick took the elevator directly to the operating floor and asked for the night superintendent.

"Good evening, Perry," he said, when that official admitted him. "I wonder if you will do me a favor that will cause you some trouble?"

"If it isn't too much of a stunt, Nick. What is it?"

"Yesterday there were two telegrams sent to Mr. Boynton, here, to whom I have just introduced you, from Chicago. I know that one of them was sent over this company's lines, but I do not know about the other, because it was not received. I want you to have it looked up, and a copy of everything that came over your wires for him, sent to me at my house. Will you do that?"

"There isn't any lawsuit involved in this thing, is there?"

"I will pledge you my word that you will never hear of the subject again in any form."

"All right, Nick. I'll have it done. I'll mail the result to you when I go off duty in the morning."

"Thank you. Now, one more thing."

"Yes."

"There was also a telegram sent to him from Buffalo, some time yesterday——"

"I will send you copies of *everything* that came over our lines for Peyton Boynton. That is what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'll attend to it."

The detective thanked his friend and left the building; and then he and Boynton walked together to Murray Street, where they entered the Postal Building, and where the same request was preferred and its fulfilment promised.

"Now," said the detective, as they left the building together, "we will know something about those telegrams by to morrow. We are on the trail to find out why you did not receive your messages."

"It all seems so simple when you do it," said Boynton.

"It is only because I think of it. And now, Mr. Boynton, I am of the mind to go with you to your club and make the acquaintance of those two gentlemen. What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Very good. We will go to my house first, and after that to the club."

"But why take the time to stop at your house, Carter?"

"Because, for reasons of my own, I prefer to go to your club under another character than my own. I want you to introduce me to your friends under another name than Carter, and I wish to talk with them about the Klondike; that is all."

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER PLAYS A DOUBLE GAME.

"Who will have to bear this loss, you or the bank?" asked the detective of Boynton, as they were leaving the house some time later, on their way to the club. The detective had arrayed himself as a pompous individual of middle age, who looked as if he might be the president of a country bank himself, and it was agreed between them that he would be introduced as Mr. Nichols, of Saratoga.

"I do," replied Boynton, without hesitation. "That is why I have determined to say nothing about it if it can be avoided."

"Do you mean that the bank is in no way responsible?"

"I do."

"Why not?"

"Because the whole transaction was irregular."

"How was it irregular?"

"You remember that I told you of the wire from Chicago, which asked me to be in readiness to pay that sum, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, in order to be quite ready, I drew my official check for the amount, and so had the cash ready for the thief when he got there."

"Well?"

"And I gave him the cash myself. I accepted the draft he gave me for it, intending to deposit that draft, with my endorsement on the back of it, in the morning."

"Am I to understand that Hawkins did not have that amount of cash in the bank when you received the draft?"

"Exactly that; nor anywhere near it."

"Why then did you cash it at all? Why did you even consider such a thing?"

"There are several reasons why I did so. One is that in the nature of things, if this money was to be expended for the good of our properties in the Klondike, it was my place to stand half of it."

"Well?"

"And the other is that I was so enthused about the whole thing that I felt just as if I was merely planting that much money for a short time in order to pull out an enormous crop from the seed. In a word, I was an ass."

"Quite so, if you will excuse me for saying it."

"Oh, don't mind me. Rub it in. I don't mind."

"Has Hawkins as much as half that amount in the bank at the present time?"

"He hasn't ten thousand dollars on deposit with us, as a matter of fact."

"And how great an amount of your own—personal, I mean—have you on deposit?"

"You are nailing me down pretty hard, Carter."

"I mean to do so, and I mean to help you out, also, if you will let me do it in my own way, and if you will answer the questions I ask you."

"I'll do it."

"Then reply to that one."

"I have about a hundred thousand dollars on deposit in the bank now."

"So you were really using the bank's funds in cashing that draft, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you have got to make it good somehow."

"I've got to make good to-morrow morning, and the devil only knows how I am going to do it, either!"

Nick smiled, and for a moment said nothing at all. Then he asked:

"Where is that draft now?"

"In my pocket."

"Would you mind letting me look at it?"

"Not at all. Here it is."

The detective came to a full stop under an electric light and examined the draft carefully. Then, quietly, he folded it and placed it in his pocket.

"I want you to let me keep this for the present," he said.

"What in the world for?" demanded Boynton.

"Well, I have a reason which I prefer not to tell you just at present. But it will do no harm. And I'll tell you what I'll do for you, Mr. Boynton."

"What is that?"

"If you will give me your stock in the bank as security, together with your note and such other collateral as you may have handy, I will come to your aid in the morning. I somehow do not think you will need it a very long time."

"Great heavens, Carter! Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Why! You scarcely know me at all. You never saw me before in your life, did you? I never heard of such a thing! It is——" He stopped still in the street in abject surprise and astonishment.

Nick Carter laughed aloud, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"No," he said, "personally, I do not know you; but I do know a very good friend of yours who is also a very good friend of mine, and through him I know that you are—or intend to be—the soul of honor. It was a slip of yours when you used the bank's funds to-day, to pay that draft, and you will never do that again."

"You bet your life I won't!"

"And you would not have done it this time if you had not known that you could repay it if the necessity should arise."

"And you are willing to do this extraordinary favor for me just because a mutual friend of ours has spoken well of me?"

"That is one reason; but there is also another."

"What is that, please?"

"I have a fancy that you will be questioned about that two hundred and twenty-five thousand, nine hundred and sixty dollars, to-morrow."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have. And I want you to be in a position to reply fairly to all questions. You can truthfully say—if the question should be asked—that you paid the draft out of your own pocket."

"But——"

"But the question will not be asked if the funds are there in the bank."

"Really, Carter, you are altogether too much for me. I cannot follow you at all. I have not the least idea in the world what you are driving at."

"And just at the present moment it is not necessary that you should have."

"Are you in earnest? You will lend me that money? Of course, I could raise it during the day, but it would embar——"

"I will loan you the money."

"In the morning?"

"You shall have a check for it before we part to-night."

"Well, I just want to tell you one thing, and that's this: All those stories about Cinderella, and Aladdin, and the whole bunch of them aren't in it with you. And I'll tell you another thing, too, when that Klondike business——"

"Don't make rash promises, Mr. Boynton. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. You are not sure yet just what the standing of that Klondike business is. Isn't that your club over there?"

"Yes."

"Shall we cross over here?"

"Yes."

"Don't forget that I am Mr. Nichols, and that you met me only a few moments ago. Here we are. You must put me up at the club in due form. Have a two weeks' card issued for me, and all that. Then, after the introductions, leave the greater part of the talking to me if you can."

"Carter, one would almost suspect that you scent a conspiracy somewhere, of which I am to be made the victim."

"Never mind what I scent. I do scent a great deal more than I have told you. But keep up your end of the game just as you began it. Will you?"

"I will."

Then they entered the club together, the time then being exactly eleven.

They found Hawkins and Moore seated at one of the small tables in the billiard-room, where they were watching the progress of a game; but Boynton at once called them to the adjoining room and there presented them both to "Mr. Nichols."

Nick was the pompous country banker to the letter; the individual whose curiosity is so much greater than his bank-account; and he began at once his line of action.

"My friend Mr. Boynton tells me that you have just returned from the Klondike," he said to Hawkins, but including Moore in the same interrogative statement.

"Yes," replied Hawkins, at once. "Wonderful country, that, Mr. Nichols."

"So I am told. But it must be frightfully cold there; no?"

"Not so very cold. The summers are pleasant."

"And gold, gold, gold everywhere, I suppose. You almost pick it up in the streets, I am told; eh?"

"Well, not quite that, you know," drawled Braxton Moore. "All the same, Mr. Nichols, the properties we have purchased there render the finding of gold almost the same as picking it up in the streets."

"You don't tell me so! You don't tell me! Now, that is truly wonderful. I don't suppose you will have any stock for sale at all, will you?"

Hawkins shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I am afraid not," he said. "Mr. Moore's father—the Earl of Cranleigh, you know——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Nick. "You don't mean to tell me that this gentleman's father is an earl; eh? A real earl? Then I suppose you will be one yourself, some day, young man; eh?"

"No," laughed Braxton Moore. "That fortunate lot falls to my elder brother. I have the misfortune to be a younger son."

"Ah! Yes. And so you have ventured out among the gold-fields in search of your fortune. Now I call that extremely fine. I do, indeed; eh?"

"I ventured there in search of it, and I have found it," replied Moore.

"You don't tell me so!"

"Mr. Hawkins and I together, that is."

"You are partners, then?"

"Not exactly. I am a prospective partner. Mr. Hawkins and your friend Mr. Boynton are partners."

"Dear me! Boynton, why in the world did you not tell me about that, and give me a chance in with you? Now I shouldn't hesitate at all to put up a considerable sum with you; and I am not too old to make a venture of that kind; eh?"

"Certainly not," said Hawkins. "Possibly we may give you an opportunity in the thing, as it is."

"You don't tell me so! Really? Boynton, I'll hold *you* for that half-promise, if the opportunity should offer. By the way, Mr. Moore!"

Nick wheeled in his chair suddenly so that he faced Braxton Moore.

"Well?" inquired the latter.

"When I was introduced to you just now, I could have sworn that I had seen you before, and now it has just occurred to me where it was."

"Yes?" said Moore, with polite interest. "Where was it?"

"This afternoon; I had some friends who sailed on the *Celtic* to-day, and I went down to see them off. There was a gentleman there who stood next to us. I remember perfectly, now. He was an exact copy of yourself—only older; considerably older. But otherwise just the same. Exactly the same. Really. I wonder if it could have been that brother of yours who will some day become an earl. Do you think so?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE GIANT SPRINGS A TRAP.

The detective, as he asked the question, watched narrowly the face of Braxton Moore, and he managed at the same time, without seeming to do so, to keep in view, also, the face of Jacob Hawkins.

There was a quick exchange of furtive glances between the two men, and a sort of half-gasp, as if for breath, on the part of Braxton Moore.

He made exactly the same gesture that one might make who passed suddenly around a sharp corner and came face to face with a sharp gust of wind that was totally unexpected—and then he was thoroughly himself again.

He laughed loudly at the question; rather too loudly as a matter of fact; and then he replied:

"I hardly think that could be possible. My brother has never visited this country."

"Well, then," said the supposed Mr. Nichols, "it must have been a cousin. The likeness is certainly extraordinary. Most extraordinary; eh?"

"What steamer did you say?" asked Moore, now thoroughly at ease again, and smiling placidly at the supposed country banker.

"The *Celtic*. Yes. What an enormously big steamer it is, too; eh?"

"Certainly. It is a mammoth affair."

"Now, Mr. Moore, who do you suppose it could have been who looked so much like you; eh?"

"Really, sir, I haven't the remotest idea."

"No? That's strange, isn't it? Eh? I wonder if there is wandering somewhere around the world a man who looks as much like me as that man looked like you. I have heard that everybody has a double. Have you ever heard that?"

"Oh, yes, frequently. And that reminds me that it was not long after we had met that Mr. Boynton asked me if I had a double. Is it possible, Mr. Boynton, that you could have encountered this same individual to whom your friend refers?"

He turned and faced Boynton squarely as he asked the question; but the latter was not caught off his guard, nevertheless.

"I think not," he replied easily. "It was some time ago—months, I think—that I saw the man who drew forth that question of mine. Possibly it was the same one, however."

"Oh!" interjected the supposed Nichols, "this man I saw could not be called a double, for while the resemblance was remarkable—quite remarkable, I assure you—the gentleman I saw at the steamer was older than Mr. Moore; much older."

The detective dropped Moore then and turned to Hawkins.

"I wish you would tell me something about those mines of yours," he said.

"Do you? What would you like to know about them?" asked Hawkins.

He evidently made an effort to render his question cordial, but he did not succeed. It was asked rather bruskly, and there was a strained coldness in his voice that had not been there before; moreover, there was a contraction of the eyes as well, as if he were trying to concentrate his thoughts upon what was at the moment in hand and at the same time think of something else as well.

"That question was a bull's-eye," thought the detective, congratulating himself silently. "I thought it would be so; I even dared to hope that it would be so."

And then he responded to the question.

"Why, Mr. Hawkins, I would like to know everything about them that you are willing to tell me, of course. I am getting beyond the years when I would care to venture into that far-away country, but I am not at all averse to taking a flyer in something that is there, provided I could get in on the ground floor."

Hawkins pulled himself together with a visible effort. He waved his hand toward Boynton, and replied:

"You must make your arrangements in this matter

with Boynton. He is my partner, and if he wishes to let you in—'on the ground floor,' as you express it—I am sure that I have no objections."

"Well, well, I will talk it over with Boynton in that case."

He looked at his watch ostentatiously.

"Dear me! It *is* getting late. Boynton, would you mind walking around to my hotel with me? It would be an act of charity on your part, for I always expect to be held up on the streets when I am in New York alone at night."

He left his chair and pulled down his waistcoat two or three times; and, then, with a grandiloquent bow, he bade Hawkins and Moore good night and followed Boynton from the room.

Nothing was said between them until they were in the street, and then, before Nick Carter spoke at all, he passed rapidly across the sidewalk to the curb and whispered a word or two through the window of a coupé that was standing there, waiting.

Then he rejoined Boynton.

"Now, what the devil does it all mean?" demanded the banker, as soon as they were walking side by side up the avenue toward the Waldorf.

"It really means a lot," replied the detective. "Mr. Boynton, it is not my habit to give my ideas of a case away to a client so early in the game, but I will make an exception in your case, for the reason that I confidently expect rather startling developments after to-night."

"You do? How so?"

"Well, for one thing, I have spotted your robber—and he knows I have."

"*What?*"

Boynton stopped dead still in the street, but Nick seized him hastily by the arm and dragged him along again.

"Don't do that," he said. "Keep moving."

"Why?"

"Because we are followed."

"Followed! We are? By whom?"

"By Hawkins; or by Moore; or by both of them; or, possibly, by some person whom they have put on our track."

"Do you mean to tell me that the Braxton Moore who sat there in the club with us, is the same man who robbed me this afternoon?"

"I most certainly do."

"And that Hawkins knows all about it?"

"More than that. Hawkins planned it."

"I cannot believe it."

"Fortunately, you don't have to—just at the present moment. It will come home to you soon enough."

"It is incredible!"

"It is, nevertheless, true."

"Who did you speak to in that coupé?"

"One of my assistants—Chick, I call him."

"Why was he there?"

"To obey my orders."

"But what is he to do?"

"He is to follow the men who follow us."

"But why should we be followed at all?"

"Because Hawkins and Moore will not be quite satisfied about me. They will want to know where I go, who I am, and all about me."

"But why? What in the world——"

"That crack I made at them about the *Celtic* was a facer. It took them in the wind. It almost knocked the breath out of Moore. Didn't you see him gasp?"

"No; I cannot say that I did."

"Well, I did, and that was enough."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have suspected all the time that the man who robbed me was in league with Hawkins, and that the same man was the one I had already met in Hawkins' company?"

"Yes; I suspected it from the first. When I examined those letters, at your office, I knew it. Those letters and that draft are not forgeries; they are genuine."

"Great Heaven, Carter! I cannot imagine it. What in the world is the game? What is Hawkins' game?"

"The game is that they are out of money and they need some, so they have put up this little job on you. The remainder of the game probably is that Hawkins means to beat you out of all your holdings in the Klondike—finally."

"As well as out of this sum of money which amounts almost to a quarter of a million?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me——"

"Wait, Boynton. I can't tell you any more to-night. We are almost at the Waldorf where I am going to enter as if I had been staying there since I came to town, where I know all the clerks, and where I can prepare for any questions that will be asked concerning me to-night."

"And I? What do you want me to do?"

"I want you, for the present, to return to your club and act as if nothing had happened. You will probably find Hawkins or Moore waiting for you when you get back. If you ever acted a part in your life, I want you to do it to-night. Can you do it?"

"I can try. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I want you to be perfectly natural. Just as if nothing unusual had happened at all. If you are asked who I am, you must reply that I am Carter Nichols, of Saratoga—just as you introduced me. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Stick to your text. That is all."

"Suppose that Hawkins should ask me if I have lost any money to-day?"

"If he does that, call an officer and give him in charge at once. But he won't do that."

"And you? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to take a room at the Waldorf under the name of Nichols. And here we are. Good night. I want you to go back now."

"But I must see you early in the morning. That check, you know——"

"By Jove! I forgot that check. Meet me at the Fifth Avenue Hotel at eight o'clock in the morning, and you shall have it."

"Done! I will be there. Will you be in this disguise?"

"No; but I will know you even if you do not know me. You may call me Brown when I accost you in the morning."

"All right. Good night."

They parted then, and Boynton hurried away, while Nick turned into the hotel and went at once to the desk where he called one of the clerks aside—one who was well known to him.

"Hello, Tommy," he said. "Don't you know me?"

"I didn't; but I do now. How are you, Nick?"

"Splendid, Tommy, I am stopping here; I have been here since yesterday; I am Mr. Carter Nichols, of Saratoga, a banker. Are you on?"

"Sure thing."

"Pass the word to the other clerks, will you?—and then come back here."

That was done, and when the clerk returned, Nick said:

"There is likely to be somebody in here at any moment asking about me. You have got your lesson all right? Have the others got theirs?"

"Sure thing."

"Now, whoever does ask questions, will you please spot him, or them, for me, so that you can give me a good description of the man or men?"

"You bet I will!"

"And presently Chick will stroll inside and ask for me. Give me a key to one of your rooms, and send him up when he comes. Will you do that?"

"Sure. Will I know him?"

"He will make himself known. He knows you and he will go straight to you. Is that the key? Thank you."

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW KIND OF EXPERT WORK.

The detective had suspected from the very first, when he was made acquainted with the story of the robbery by which Peyton Boynton had been deprived of almost a quarter of a million dollars, that the man Hawkins was somehow concerned in it—and if Hawkins were concerned, it followed as a natural sequence that his friend and associate, Braxton Moore, would be in the same boat.

That was why he had insisted upon seeing the letter at once; that was why he regarded it as important that they should go to the bank without delay and inspect the documents in the case.

And that inspection of the documents had settled it.

Quite naturally, Nick Carter is an expect in handwriting as well as in other things. It is part of the training of a good detective to be as expert in all things as his capacity and his powers of absorption will permit.

With Nick Carter, nothing had been neglected.

It has been told over and over again how Nick Carter, when a boy, was trained by his father for the great career that was to be his future, and how old Sim Carter had left nothing unattended to which would add to the thoroughness of that training.

Nick suspected, when he heard Boynton's story, that the supposed forgeries were not forgeries at all, and that the whole thing was a carefully laid plot on the part of Hawkins and Moore by which they hoped to provide themselves with ample funds to use while they were back in the States.

The inspection of the letters had convinced him of this; there was no longer any doubt in his mind on the subject.

But in order to clinch the matter—in order that there might be no mistake, he had then and there resolved upon two things: To ask for the telegrams, as we have seen him do, and to spring that little word-trap about the *Celtic*.

Then, later, when he left the club and walked to the Waldorf with his new friend, he was certain in his own mind that Hawkins and Moore would still further betray themselves by making a visible attempt to discover who the mysterious Mr. Nichols could be.

When Nick accepted the key from the clerk and turned away toward the elevator, he was about to pass inside to be taken to the tenth floor when he saw Braxton Moore enter the hotel office hastily, go to the desk—and by a turn of fortune's wheel, it was the clerk whom Nick had addressed as Tommy to whom he applied.

"I wish to know if Mr. Nichols, of Saratoga, is stopping here?" he asked quickly of the clerk. Nick, in the meantime, had turned back from the elevator and was again approaching the desk, unseen by Moore.

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk. "He came in only a moment ago. Shall I send up your card?"

"If you please. Yes."

While Moore was producing a card, the clerk called out:

"Front! Take the gentleman to the tubes. Card to ten-forty-four. Mr. Nichols. *Ah!*"

Nick had stepped forward.

"Didn't I hear my name?" he asked. And then pretending suddenly to recognize Braxton Moore, he exclaimed:

"Why! Mr. Moore, isn't it? Sure! I did not expect to see you again so soon. Were you asking for me?"

"Yes," replied Moore, as they turned away from the desk and sought a couple of chairs along the Thirty-fourth Street corridor. "I—the fact is that I found myself strangely interested in what you said about seeing a man at the steamer to-day who resembled me. It has occurred to me that possibly it *might* have been my brother—or my cousin."

"I am quite sure that he must be a relative of yours, sir," replied the supposed Mr. Nichols. "Only, as I said before, he looked to be quite ten years your senior."

"I wish that I might have seen him," murmured Moore, half to himself; and Nick Carter permitted himself to smile, for he saw plainly that Braxton Moore was palpably in doubt about the matter, and that he was hoping almost against hope that this Saratoga banker really had seen such an individual as he described.

"That would hardly be possible, now," replied the detective. "The ship is at sea, you know, don't you?"

"Certainly."

"It isn't at all unlikely, is it, that your brother might have been making a visit to this country?"

"N-no; certainly not."

"I'll tell you what you might do, Mr. Moore, to settle the matter in your own mind."

"Really? What would you suggest?"

"Why, I have heard, somewhere, that almost all the titled Englishmen who come to this country, stop here at the Waldorf. Why don't you go to the desk and ask if your brother has been here? Is his name Moore, also?"

"He is Lord Byron Moore."

"Then I would go to the desk and ask if Lord Byron Moore has been stopping here lately. If it were he whom I saw—well, it will do no harm to ask."

"That is true. I'll do it."

Moore left his seat in the chair along the wall and hastened to the desk, and again it was "Tommy" to whom he put the question—and when he asked it, Nick stood directly behind him, and catching "Tommy's" eye, winked and nodded, and then turned away toward the porter's desk.

Fortunately, in asking the question, he gave Tommy just the cue that was necessary for his reply, and Nick Carter smiled again, well pleased.

"I strongly suspect that my brother has been stopping here, and that he sailed for home to-day," he said apologetically. "I wish you would tell me if he has been here at this hotel."

"And what might be the name of your brother?" asked Tommy.

"Lord Byron Moore."

"One moment, please, and I will tell you."

The clerk turned away and searched hastily through the pages of a book on one of the desks inside the office; but after a moment he returned.

"There has been a Byron Moore here, from London," he said. "I don't know whether he was a lord, or not. He left this morning; that is, he paid his bill this morning. I think he sailed on the"—Tommy raised his eyes and glanced across toward Nick Carter who was standing with his back toward them, at the porter's desk, but who, nevertheless, was at that moment busily studying the steamer bulletin upon which the name *Celtic* appeared in large letters—"I am quite sure that he sailed on the *Celtic*, sir. I will inquire of the head porter, sir, if you wish."

"No, no; thank you. It is not necessary. It is odd, though, that he should be here in the city when I arrived from the West, and that he should have sailed away this very day. I wish I might have known it."

The clerk did not think that this remark required an answer, so he made none, and Braxton Moore turned away and rejoined the detective, who was now engaged in examining a Bullinger guide.

"Ah," he said, when Moore came up to him. "I was looking up my train in the morning. Well, what did you discover, Mr. Moore?"

"I found out that my brother has been here; that he did sail on the *Celtic* to-day. It is the most astounding coincidence I ever heard of."

"Indeed! Why so, if I may ask?"

"Because—but it does not matter. I only wish I might have known that he was here. It would have saved me from being drawn into a duced ugly pickle, don'tcher-know. And to think that I came within an ace of sailing on that very ship myself."

"You did?"

"Yes—really; and by Jove! Mr. Nichols, I wish I had done so."

"No doubt; no doubt. It would have been pleasant to have met your brother after so long a separation. Will you go into the café? It is almost closing time, but we have time——"

"Thank you—yes. I'll take a B. & S. with you."

Seated at the table in the café, Nick took the opportunity to discover how much he could pump out of the young Englishman.

"How long were you in the Klondike country, Mr. Moore?" he asked.

"Two years," was the reply.

"And were you all that time associated with Mr. Hawkins?"

"Yes; I met him as soon as I arrived there."

"I suppose you regard him as the maker of your fortune?" ventured the detective tentatively.

"Well, hardly that, although I think there is a fortune there for all of us as soon as we raise sufficient money to swing it."

"And—er—Hawkins? Do you find him to be all that you would wish your partner to be, in a venture of this kind?"

Braxton Moore regarded Nick through narrowed eyelids for a moment, and then he demanded:

"Don't you think, sir, that that is rather a strange question to ask of me?"

"Not at all—when I am considering the advisability of putting some of my own money into the venture. I shall probably ask Hawkins the same question about you."

"Oh! Will you? Well, sir, permit me to observe that I do not think we shall require any of your money in our venture, or any men of your stamp, either. I bid you good night."

He started abruptly to his feet, and without another word and without turning his head, he stalked from the hotel into the street; and Nick Carter leaned back in his chair and chuckled audibly, while he lighted a cigar.

"That was a corker!" he told himself. "That shot went home, at least. One thing is certain, and that is that Braxton Moore is not a willing criminal. He has committed a crime, but he has not done it willingly, and not without protest. He has been made the tool of Hawkins. He really believes that his brother has been here, and he regrets that he did not know it in time to save himself. All the same, he is a plucky young chap, and he will stand for what he has done and take his medicine like a major—if he has to do so. And he is as cool as an iceberg, too, if he has half a chance. Hello! There comes Chick."

Chick sauntered carelessly into the hostelry and was making his way to the desk when he discovered the detective who was now seated in the corridor again, and he approached him at once and dropped into a chair beside him.

"I saw you talking with the fellow yourself," he said to Nick, "so I waited outside until you had finished. He came out of the club soon after you did and followed you leisurely to the hotel. Then, when he saw you enter, he turned back again and was almost at the club on his return when he changed his mind and turned back here."

"That's all right," said the detective. "What about the other one?—Hawkins?"

"I left Patsy there to look out for him."

"All right. Come on, now. I'll return this key to the clerk, and then we'll go up in the elevator and cross through to the Waldorf side, descend again, and leave the building by the Thirty-third Street entrance."

"Thank you, old man," he said to Tommy, a moment later, when he returned the key. "I find that I shall not need it, after all; but all the same, if anybody should inquire, I wish you would stand for the little romance we fixed up together."

"Sure thing, Nick."

"I'm going up to the tenth floor, then through the building, and down on the other side, so good night," he said, then. "You can say that I have gone to bed, if anybody should ask you."

"Sure."

And so, followed by Chick, the detective took the elevator and disappeared.

But he had hardly been shot out of sight when Jacob Hawkins entered at one of the Thirty-fourth Street doors and approached the desk rapidly.

"I wish to see Mr. Nichols, at once," he said. "It is very important. If he has retired I will have to ask you to rouse him."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ENCOUNTER IN A HOTEL CORRIDOR.

The following morning at the breakfast-table, the detective received several interesting communications.

The first one he read was from the clerk, "Tommy," and it was as follows:

"You had no sooner disappeared last night than a man named Hawkins insisted upon seeing you. I told him you could not be disturbed. He insisted. I finally sent—that is I pretended to send from the office directly to your room (!). The boy returned, of course, with the message that you would have to be excused; and Hawkins went away in a huff."

The next communication was from the Postal Telegraph superintendent. It read:

"DEAR MR. CARTER: There were no messages sent over our lines yesterday addressed to Mr. Peyton Boynton, from either Chicago, or Buffalo, and there were no messages to him at all that were signed Hawkins.

"BLAISDELL."

The next one was:

"DEAR NICK: "I enclose a copy of all the messages delivered by us to Peyton Boynton yesterday. The only one which seems to bear upon what you asked of me, is the one which he admitted having received from Chicago, signed Braxton Moore. There was no message over our lines to him signed Hawkins. PERRY."

"Well, Chick," said the detective, looking across the table, "that seems to settle that part of it. We know now that Hawkins lied when he told Boynton that he had wired him from Buffalo—and that is practically all I wished to know. Now, Patsy!"

"Yes, sir."

"What have you got to say about Hawkins, last night, after Chick and I came away?"

"Nothing much. After Chick left me in front of the club to watch for him, it was quite a long time before he came out. In fact, the other man had returned."

"Moore?"

"Yes. He had been inside the club only a few minutes when Hawkins went out and he legged it for fair for the Waldorf. There, he went to the desk——"

"I know what he did at the desk. What did he do after that?"

"He returned to the club. That is all."

"Chick," said the detective, "you and Patsy must get into some sort of disguise and take up the club end of the business this morning." He looked at his watch. "It is now a quarter past seven. You had best be on hand by eight."

"Very well."

"I want you to keep tabs on Hawkins, Chick; and you, Patsy, will look after Braxton Moore."

"Yes, sir."

"I want a complete history for the day, of each one of them, irrespective of anything else that may happen."

The detective went into his study immediately after breakfast, and having dressed himself to represent a Southern gentleman of the old school, broad-brimmed hat, string tie, and all, he hastened to the Fifth Avenue Hotel to keep his appointment with Boynton, at half-past eight.

He was somewhat surprised and rather annoyed when he arrived there, to discover that Hawkins was with Boynton; and he also saw that Chick was there as well, keeping watch over the quarry that had been assigned to him.

The detective understood perfectly well what had happened.

Hawkins had unquestionably been greatly disturbed by the events of the preceding night, and being wily and shrewd, he had resolved in his own mind that he would not lose sight of Peyton Boynton during that entire day.

"The fellow has made up his mind that there is something doing somewhere, only he does not know quite where it is, or what it is," mused the detective. "I don't believe that he half swallowed that fiction about Byron Moore. He knows that Boynton is about two hundred and twenty-six thousand dollars out, this morning, and he knows that he has got to make good. He has made up his mind that he will stand in the way of it if possible. Now, if Boynton is only smart enough to catch on, we will fix him."

The detective strolled up and down the wide lobby of the hotel aimlessly, until at last he managed to approach the two men while they stood so that Hawkins' back was turned in his direction and Boynton was facing him.

Then, managing to catch Boynton's eye, he nodded and signaled with his hands, and at once turned away again, walked to the front of the lobby and seated himself on one of the settees with the morning *Herald* in his hand.

And Boynton did catch on.

Five minutes passed, and then Boynton and Hawkins started toward the front door. They were just passing the settee where Nick was seated when Boynton came to a sudden stop and stared at Nick.

"Excuse me, Hawkins, just a moment," he said, as naturally as it could have been said under any circumstances; and then he crossed hastily to where Nick was seated.

"Pardon me," he said. "Colonel Seelover?"

"Yes, sir, that is my—— *Why!* Boynton, how are you?"

Hawkins, not to be shaken off, had now approached them, plainly determined to be introduced to the stranger from the South; but the detective continued rapidly, as if he had not seen him:

"This is a fortunate meeting, Boynton. It is, indeed, sir. You are just the man I wanted to see. I should have been at your office soon after ten. Just come this way with me for a moment, will you?"

He started from his seat and hurried rapidly toward the desk, smiling when he heard the voice of Hawkins calling impatiently to Boynton.

At the desk he said to the clerk in charge:

"I want a private room where there is writing material; I want it for about half an hour; I wish to talk privately with a gentleman. I will pay for it when I come down. You need not send a boy with me. Just give me the key and I will find the room. I am Nick Carter."

The key was handed to him at once, and he turned just as Boynton, closely followed by Hawkins, approached the desk.

"This way, Boynton," he said, pretending still not to notice Hawkins; and he started for the elevator.

But Hawkins was not to be shaken off. He still followed, and he managed to crowd himself into the elevator with them; and still, Nick pretended not to notice, and Boynton, taking the cue from him, said nothing.

Hawkins' jaws were set squarely, and there was an expression of grim determination upon his features, all of which Nick Carter noticed.

"The fellow is a regular bulldog for hanging on," he thought to himself. "If he sticks long enough, I'll teach him a little lesson."

When they left the elevator, Nick led the way along the hall to the door of the room represented on the tag of the key. He unlocked it and threw it open, and then he stepped back with a sign to Boynton to enter—and all this time he had pretended not to see or notice Hawkins at all.

Boynton passed through the door into the room, and Hawkins was about to follow, when Nick grasped him

rather forcibly by the shoulder and pulled him unceremoniously into the corridor again.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded, in excellent imitation of the Southern drawl.

"I am a friend and partner of Mr. Boynton's," replied Hawkins angrily. "I am here with him."

"But this is my room, sir. I did not ask you to accompany us here. I did not, in fact, know that you were following us. This is a private matter of business, and you will be good enough to excuse us."

"I am with Mr. Boynton, and where he goes, I go. I don't care a damn about your room. I am going inside if——"

That was as far as he got, for Nick Carter again seized him by the shoulder, and this time he whirled him around with no gentle hand and sent him spinning down the hall where, at some distance away, he sprawled at full length upon the floor.

And as that happened, Nick quietly followed Boynton into the room and closed and locked the door.

"I have heard of cheek and I have encountered what is usually called gall, in the course of my varied experience," said Nick, laughing, "but I never was up against any specimen of either that Hawkins didn't have skinned a mile."

"I couldn't shake him off," said Boynton.

"So I perceived. He doesn't propose to give you an opportunity to raise that money to-day, does he?"

"Evidently not."

"Well, here is your check. I had it already made out for you. Now take a bit of advice."

"Yes."

"Hawkins will still stick to you. I don't think he will let you lose him unless you come to an open quarrel, and I wouldn't do that—to-day."

"No."

"Stop at my bank on your way down-town. I think you must know some of the officials there, don't you?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Take the check into the private office. Indorse it there and ask them to send the cash to you by their messenger. The point is that I don't want Hawkins in any way to get onto the fact that Nick Carter's name is signed to that check. You can do that without putting Hawkins wise, can't you?"

"I think so; yes."

"Well, that is all. I'll show up at your bank in this rig after awhile—some time a little before noon, I imagine."

Nick had turned toward the door when Boynton stopped him.

"Suppose that Hawkins is waiting for us in the hall?" he asked.

"I do suppose that he is. Come along."

The detective opened the door and, as he had expected, he found Hawkins there, pacing up and down like a caged tiger; and the moment they appeared he turned upon Boynton savagely.

"What in thunder does this mean?" he demanded.

"What does what mean?" asked Boynton quietly.

"This manner in which you treat me? Who is this man who presumes to lay violent hands upon me? What business have you two got together that I cannot hear? Are you trying to do me out of my interests in——"

"Softly, suh; softly!" said Nick, interposing. "When you ask a question like that, you implicate me. I see that you are excited, so I will overlook it this time, but do not dare to repeat it. Where I come from they do not countenance such language as you are using. Our business was of a private nature—private business of my own, and if you have any objections to offer to that, suh, I'll shoot the top of your damned head off, suh. Mr. Boynton, good morning. I will see you at the bank later in the day."

The detective did not wait to hear what the two men had to say to each other after that, but he hastened on ahead of them to the elevator and descended to the ground floor, where he went at once to the desk and paid for the use of the room.

Then he winked at Chick, who was waiting, and passing through the Twenty-third Street entrance, he walked rapidly toward Sixth Avenue.

"One thing is quite certain," he mused, as he went, "Hawkins is frightened, and he knows now that if he is found out in what he has done, Boynton is the only man who can save him; and I don't much think that Boynton will be inclined to do that, either."

He crossed the avenue, and as he turned to ascend the down-town stairs, he saw Braxton Moore hurrying toward him down the street, evidently with the determination to take the same train down-town.

CHAPTER IX.

BADGERING TWO SCOUNDRELS TO FURY.

The detective might easily have caught the train ahead of the one that was possible for Braxton Moore, but he purposely loitered in producing his change in order to give the young Englishman an opportunity to catch up with him.

Braxton Moore, of course, had no idea that he was following the same man with whom he had conversed the preceding evening at the Waldorf Hotel; he was engaged now in keeping in view a man, evidently a Southerner, whom Hawkins had told him to follow.

There were a number of people on the station-platform, as there always is on the down-town side at that time of day, and presently Nick discovered that the Englishman was directly beside him, close enough so they might have touched each other.

They made the journey to Rector Street together, seated side by side; and here the detective determined to have some fun with the young man.

From the Rector Street station of the elevated he, therefore, went directly to the up-town station of the subway, at Wall Street, and descending, took an express-train up-town.

Moore still followed him.

Nick remained in the train until they arrived at the Seventy-second Street station, and there he left it, again being followed by Moore.

But the detective did not leave the station; he merely crossed to the other side and took another express-train down-town, with Braxton Moore still in his wake.

This time he left the train at Forty-second Street and changed to a local, and from that he got off at the station nearest his own home.

"Now, Mr. Moore," he said, "if you will follow me a little farther, I'll have some fun with you, sure."

The detective walked directly toward his own house and finally ascended the steps—or, started to do so, when he turned suddenly and confronted the Englishman, who was not far behind him.

Moore would have stopped when he saw Nick make this move, but the detective stepped quickly toward him, and smiling blandly, he said:

"Young man, you seem to be greatly interested in my movements, but you follow badly. Now, it would be a whole lot easier for you if you should walk right along by my side, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir!" was the haughty reply.

"Don't you? Then you are more stupid than I supposed."

"Sir?"

"Oh, don't come the high and mighty with me, my friend. I don't know who you are, and I suspect that you don't know who I am, and are trying to find out. Now, if you particularly wish to know, and if it will relieve you of any further trouble on my account, here is my card."

The detective produced a card-case, from which he abstracted a card and gave it to the Englishman.

Upon it was engraved the legend, "Colonel Bowie Seelover, Lexington, Kentucky." (The detective always kept a supply of engraved cards on hand to fit his favorite costumes.)

"Now, sir," he said, "will you be good enough to tell me why you have been following me?"

"It was an accident, I assure you, sir," replied Moore confusedly.

"Really? Well, since no harm is done, and because I suspect who it was who directed you to follow me, I will forgive you. Will you walk around to the Holland House and have a toddy?"

"Who do you think it was——" began Moore, and stopped.

"Come along to the Holland House, and I'll answer you as we go," said the detective, taking Moore familiarly, but nevertheless, firmly by the arm, and turning him about. "I suspect that it was that man—I don't know his name—who was with Boynton, who set you onto me; eh?"

Moore did not reply.

"I don't know whether he is a friend of yours or not, but I can tell you one thing about him, suh," pursued the detective.

"What can you tell me about him?" demanded Moore.

"I can tell you right straight off the reel, that he's no good on earth," was the decided reply.

"I'd have you know, sir——" began Moore; but Nick interrupted him.

"Tut, tut, young man," he said. "Don't get excited. I'm the only one in this bunch who has the right to get his dander up, suh. Let me tell you something. You are young, and you are big, and you are tall, and you are strong, and you are handsome, and you are a whole lot of other things I have no doubt, but all the same, I could throw you over my head, play basket-ball with you, or write my name with bullets on your shirt-front. You're up against the wrong proposition, suh, when you tackle me, so don't try it on—and here we are at the Holland, where they mix the best toddy this side of Lexington, which is my home. Now, are you going to be agreeable and nice, and become good friends, or are you going to be nasty? Eh?"

Braxton Moore laughed uneasily. Then, with perfect frankness, he replied;

"I did follow you, sir," he said, "and there was no reason on earth for doing it save the one you stated—that Jacob Hawkins asked me to do so."

"Humph! So his name is Hawkins, is it? I've heard the name from a friend of mine. He's been out in the Klondike, hasn't he?"

"Yes," admitted Moore, amazed at the question.

"I know something about his career out there. I've got a friend there myself, who writes to me occasionally. I have heard something about the doings of this man Hawkins, and let me see—there was a young chap with him. What was his name? Oh, I have it now! Moore."

They had passed through the hotel and were now at the bar in the rear; and when the detective completed his remark, Braxton Moore went as white as chalk and seized the bar in the grip of his fingers.

But Nick appeared not to notice that at all. He went on calmly—he was only guessing at random, but he saw that he was on the right track:

"I wonder if that fellow Moore is with Hawkins; eh?"

"I—I don't think so," was the faint reply.

"Rather an unsavory pair, those two," continued the detective placidly. "That is, of course, if all that my friend has written me about them is true, suh."

Moore had now recovered his equanimity and was sipping at his toddy.

"What did you hear about them?" he asked.

"Nothing to their good, I can tell you that. Humph! So that chap who tried to thrust himself in upon Boynton and me, is Hawkins, is he? Well, well, well, I'll have to put a flea into Peyton Boynton's ear; I suttinly will!"

"But what have you to tell him about them—him, I mean?" asked Moore, rather unsteadily.

"Nothing to their good, young man. By the way, you haven't told me your name yet."

"Braxton is my name, sir."

"Braxton, eh? Braxton? Braxton? Where have I heard that name before? I don't remember, but I suttinly have heard it somewhere, suh. Well, Mr. Braxton, will you have another toddy?"

"No, thank you. I must be getting down-town, if you will excuse me."

"Suttinly! Suttinly! I suppose you have to make a report about me, eh? You can just tell Mr. Klondike Hawkins that I am a harmless Southern gentleman unless I'm 'roused, and then it is well to look out for snakes. You can tell him, also, that I know something about him, and that I'm going to make it my business to tell Peyton Boynton all I know. And when you have acquainted him with all that, you can tell him to go to the devil!"

The detective stood with a smile on his face while he watched Braxton Moore depart from the hotel and hurry toward Fourth Avenue and the subway.

"I fancy that I have put a flea in his ear," he told himself, "and I also fancy that I have done the turn now which will force Hawkins to show his hand in one way or another."

He paid the check and then sauntered into the front part of the hotel. Presently, after half an hour, he also went out, and made his way toward the subway.

Later, when he stepped from the train at the Wall Street station, he murmured to himself:

"And now, Nichols, look out for squalls."

When he entered the Bank of the Klondike, he purposely paused and spoke to the special officer in the corridor, and by him sent his card in—the card of Colonel Seelover—to the president of the bank.

He suspected that both Hawkins and Moore would be with Boynton, and he was not mistaken.

But the officer returned almost at once and asked him to step inside, so that in another moment he strolled carelessly into the room where the three men were engaged, apparently, in an earnest conversation.

He paused just beyond the threshold, and looking directly at Boynton, said:

"I was not aware, suh, that you were engaged. I will withdraw."

Hawkins started to his feet angrily.

"One moment, Colonel Seelover!" he exclaimed. "Before you leave this office, there are a few questions that I would like to ask you."

Nick looked coldly at the speaker, and then with a shrug of his shoulders which was the quintessence of studied insolence, he turned his back upon the man and spoke to Boynton again.

"Boynton," he said, "I don't like the company you keep. I will bid you good day, suh. I can transact my business elsewhere."

He moved as if to turn away again, but Hawkins started forward and with a spring placed himself between Nick and the door.

"You shall not move a step from this room," he cried, "until you have explained some statements you have made concerning me, to this gentleman;" and he indicated Moore.

The detective smiled coldly. It was his intention to anger the two men beyond all endurance if he could do so.

"This—gentleman—lied to me," he said quietly.

Hawkins took one step toward the detective, and Braxton Moore leaped to his feet with an oath on his lips; but they both came to a sudden halt.

Nick Carter had taken one quick step backward, and in that act he had also drawn from its place of concealment an ugly-looking revolver such as a Southern gentleman might carry; and now the muzzle of it was waving back and forth so that it covered both men at once.

"Sit down, suh!" he said to Moore. "And you, too, suh, you sit down or I will do what I told you this morning—blow the top of your head off. I'm from Kentucky, and I don't stand for such actions as you all are committing. Sit down, I tell you!"

The two men resumed their seats, writhing, and Nick slowly returned the revolver to his pocket.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boynton, suh," he said. "Such things don't look well in a bank, do they? If that big officer of yours had happened to look in here just then, he might have believed that I was doing quickly what these two scoundrels here are trying to do slowly—that is to say, he would have thought that I was holding you up."

He turned quickly and whipped out his revolver again, for out of the corner of his eye he had seen Hawkins make a sudden move toward his hip pocket.

"None of that!" he ordered sternly. "I'm not playing with you, Jacob Hawkins, if that is your name; nor with you, either, young-man-who-lied-to-me. So you are the man Moore, are you? And you denied your name to

me, when we talked together at the Holland, didn't you? And I know now where I had heard the name Braxton before; eh?

"You are a nice pair, you are. It is well that I can warn my friend Boynton about you.

"Don't you *dare* to make a move to draw your gun, suh! either of you; or I'll let daylight through you so quick that you couldn't say scat!

"Boynton, I've got a friend up in the Klondike. He writes to me occasionally, and he has had a good deal to say about a certain Jacob Hawkins, and a certain Braxton Moore, and what they have been doing up there these last two years. If you will come to my hotel to-night, after you have closed the bank, I will tell you all about it—about this Hawkins, and this young scion of a noble family, whose relations have discarded him.

"Be careful, there! I'm on my guard. I've had my say, and now I am going, but if either of you two want to find me any time to-day or to-night, I'm at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and I should like nothing better than an opportunity to have you thrown off the premises, which I will do if either of you dare to put in an appearance.

"Good day, Mr. Boynton, suh!"

Nick Carter turned on his heel and left the bank.

CHAPTER X.

A MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

Just outside the bank he encountered both Chick and Patsy.

Chick, of course, had followed Hawkins there, and Patsy had kept upon the trail of Braxton Moore as he had been directed to do.

Drawing them both into the shelter of a near-by doorway, he told them in a few words what had happened.

"And what will be the result of it all?" asked Chick.

"The result will be one of two things. Either the two of them will make a clean breast of all they have done, to Peyton Boynton—or they will take extraordinary measures at once to get me out of the way; and I rather think they will adopt the latter course."

"There is still another thing they might do," suggested Chick.

"What is that?"

"You know, when the mountain would not go to Mohammed, Mohammed had to go to the mountain."

"Yes."

"Well, if they cannot get out of the way, it may occur to them that they can get Mr. Boynton out of *your* way."

Nick was thoughtful for a moment.

"I hadn't thought of that, Chick," he said.

"It is one way to prevent that interview, which they dread."

"You are right there. When I was badgering them it never occurred to me that I was putting Boynton in danger. I only wanted those two fellows to show their hands against me."

"Of course. I understand that."

"I don't suppose they would undertake to murder Boynton," said the detective, half to himself, and as if he were asking himself just that question.

"I'm not at all so sure about that," ventured Chick. "To my way of thinking, Nick, you have got them on the run. They are thoroughly frightened, and they will resort to desperate remedies, if necessary, to escape the responsibility of what they have done."

"There isn't the slightest doubt of that."

"They have already seen you show your teeth, so to speak. Without doubt they have a sort of wholesome fear of you. If they can get Boynton out of the way, even temporarily, they can then take their time in settling with you. At least that is the manner in which they will regard it."

"You are right, Chick."

Nick shrugged his shoulders. Then he stamped his feet impatiently. Then he said:

"I've a good mind to go back in there and show *my* hand."

"Do you mean to arrest them at once?"

"I did mean that when I spoke, but it is not to be thought of at the present moment. Look here, Chick!"

"Yes."

"It is up to you and Patsy to keep tabs on those two fellows now. See to it that you do it, too."

"We won't lose any tricks, Nick, either of us."

"Keep in mind that suggestion of yours, too; that there is a possibility that Boynton may be in danger."

The detective turned quickly away and left them; but just around the corner in Broadway, he sought a public telephone-booth, and called up the Bank of the Klondike.

When the answer came, he said to the operator at the other end of the wire:

"I would like to speak with your cashier. Please call him to the phone;" and when the cashier responded, he asked:

"Can you call Mr. Boynton to your telephone a moment? I don't wish to have the gentlemen who are with him understand why he is wanted."

"I think I can manage it," came the reply. "Hold the wire."

Nick held the wire, and after a wait of some minutes, the voice of Boynton inquired:

"Who is it that wants me?"

"It is Carter," replied Nick. "I want you to listen to me now and to pay attention to what I shall say."

"All right. Go ahead."

"I suppose you understood that scene that we just enacted in your office, didn't you?"

"Partly, I think. Not wholly."

"Well, I wanted to make those two fellows mad, and I think I succeeded."

"There isn't any doubt whatever on that point. You should have seen and heard them after you went out."

"I can imagine it sufficiently well, thank you."

"Hawkins is raging yet."

"All the better. Let him rage. But this is not why I called you up."

"Well?"

"It was my purpose to drive the two of them into a corner and force them into a position where they would be inclined to attack me, in my character of Seelover. I wanted Hawkins to make some move to lay me out so that I could not have that supposed interview with you this evening at the hotel."

"I think I understood that much."

"Now, Boynton, it has occurred to me since I left you—it was, in fact, suggested by one of my assistants, that they might attack *you* instead of me."

"I hardly think that is likely."

"I'm not so sure about that. Anyhow, I called you up to put you on your guard. Look out for those fellows for the balance of the day. Don't let them lead you into any sort of danger, and don't let them get you where, to put it figuratively, they will have the drop on you, will you?"

"I'll look out for that. Never fear."

"I thought it best to warn you. Now tell me——"

"Yes?"

"Has Hawkins said anything since I left the bank which would indicate what he intends to do? I mean so far as Colonel Seelover is concerned?"

"Not a word—save that I think it is his intention to go after you, presently. But he won't do that until after the bank closes. He is too deeply interested in watching me just at present."

"By the way, did you get that money all right?"

"Yes. It is here in the bank, in cash."

"Good! And nobody is the wiser?"

"Not a soul. I have turned it in to the cashier, and he thinks that I did not pay it out yesterday, after all."

"That's all right, then. Now, Boynton?"

"Yes."

"If all goes well, come to the Fifth Avenue some time this evening. Say about nine. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

The detective left the telephone-booth and strolled out upon Broadway.

"Othello's occupation seems to be gone, at least for the present," was his thought. "It is true that for a time, I haven't a thing to do. As Colonel Seelover, I have simply got to wait until somebody else makes a move. I feel like Napoleon when he played chess. He never liked the game because he always wanted to move two or three times while his opponent was moving once. I'll return to the Fifth Avenue and wait there."

And he did go back there and take a room in the name of Colonel Seelover.

With the remainder of that day we have nothing to do, for the very good reason that nothing connected with this story happened.

The detective spent the balance of the day in the hotel corridor, so living up to his character as a distinguished gentleman from the South, that a reporter from the *Times* interviewed him—and published half a column of the interview the following morning.

He read the papers and finally bought a novel and read that, all the time keeping one eye on the door against the possible advent of either of the men in whom he was at present so deeply interested.

When the dinner-hour came he went to the dining-room with the other guests—and strolled out afterward, picking his teeth like the Kentuckian he represented.

He believed surely that one or the other of the two men would appear at the hotel some time that evening; but at all events, he surely expected Boynton at nine.

But nine o'clock came and brought no Boynton with it.

Half-past nine, ten, half-past ten, eleven—still Boynton did not appear. Still he had seen no sign of Hawkins or Moore, and stranger still, neither Chick nor Patsy showed up.

The detective was impatient by this time.

He strode up and down the corridor time after time, and finally, at half-past eleven, he went to the telephone and called up his own house.

Joseph replied to the call, and Nick asked him if either Chick or Patsy had been to the house during the evening.

Receiving a negative reply, he left the phone; and then returned to it and called up Boynton's club.

"Is Mr. Boynton in the club?" he asked. "Please find out if he is there, and if he is not there, find out if he has been there this afternoon or evening."

Then followed a long wait, at the end of which the clerk at the club assured him that Mr. Boynton had left the club-house early in the morning and had not returned since that time.

"I'm a fool!" muttered the detective, as he left the telephone-booth. "I should have attended to this thing myself instead of loitering all the afternoon here. Now what is the best thing for me to do? There is nothing to be done here, but where will I go and what will I do if I go out?"

He pondered very seriously over the subject, and at last he decided that he would go to Boynton's club, but that in the meantime he would leave word at the desk for him in case he should call while he was away.

Having attended to that, he passed through the corridor to the avenue, and then he stopped long enough under the portico to light a cigar.

That done, he stepped briskly out, aiming directly across the street toward the Worth statue, and entirely unheedful of the fact that a hack that had been drawn up at the curb in front of the hotel, started away at the same time he did and somehow managed to keep quite close to him while he was crossing the asphalted pavement.

He skirted the Worth statue to the east of it, and was continuing on up Fifth Avenue, when the horses attached to the hack started suddenly forward, and before the detective realized what was happening, they had ridden him down, literally, the driver having directed them full upon him.

Had the detective been less quick in his motions, or one whit less strong than he is, he must have been killed, or at least severely injured.

As it was, however, he somehow managed to seize the bit of one of the bridles, and so he kept himself from falling under the horses' feet; but even that could not save him, for the instant the horses were upon him and had knocked him from his feet, the doors of the hack were thrown open on either side, and four men leaped to the ground.

Instantly, they dashed forward to where Nick Carter was still endeavoring to regain his footing, and then, before he knew that he was attacked, while he was still endeavoring to get himself into an upright position, a sharp blow fell upon his head from a heavy cane in the grasp of one of the men.

Nick was only half-stunned, and somewhat secure in his foothold now, he turned to grapple with his assailant.

Before he could so much as seize him, however, he recived a second blow, heavier than the first one, and this time he was knocked to his knees.

Then came a third blow, and Nick Carter pitched forward unconscious into the arms of one of the men.

At the same instant he was seized and hustled into the hack, which immediately was driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAINED LIKE ANIMALS AND LEFT TO STARVE.

When consciousness returned to Nick Carter, his head was decidedly sore.

He felt of it ruefully with his fingers, and discovered that there were several well-developed bumps there; and then he bethought him to look about him.

There was enough light which struggled through a dirty and cobweb-covered window to inform him that another day was at hand, and that, therefore, he must have been unconscious for a considerable period of time, but whether he was in the loft of a stable or of a warehouse, he could not determine.

Presently, however, he heard a sound which he recognized. It was the gentle lapping and swishing of water against piling, and he knew that he was near the waterfront.

Another thing that he knew was that he was fastened to some sort of a post or stanchion, with a chain—and that the chain was big enough to have held a yoke of oxen.

The chain had been passed around his waist, and drawn as tightly as a man would wear a belt; and it was fastened in place with a huge padlock. The opposite end of the chain had been passed around a huge post, and was also fastened with a padlock. His hands and his feet were free.

At once he examined his pockets, but only to discover that everything had been taken from him; everything save—and he smiled when he made the discovery—everything save the two little revolvers he always carried up his sleeves, and which he worked on spiral springs. It was evident that when he was searched, these had not been discovered.

But his pockets were absolutely empty.

His disguise had been discovered and despoiled.

The wig he had worn was on the floor a few feet away as was also the false mustache and the imperial that went with it.

He smiled at himself there in the half-darkness of

the loft; smiled at the situation which he had brought upon himself through sheer carelessness. He knew that, and he did not attempt to disguise the fact from himself.

"Those fellows were more patient than I was," he commented. "They just simply waited for me until I came out—and when I did come out, they got me.

"That wasn't a bad trick they played on me, either, running me down. I never once thought that I was attacked. I believed it was an accident, due to a careless or a drunken driver. I wonder if they have got Boynton in the same boat?"

All this time he had not made a sound, but now he coughed slightly, and immediately from a darker corner of the loft he heard a voice, half-muffled, saying:

"Hello, there?"

"Hello yourself, and see how you like it!" replied Nick. "Who are you?"

"Is that you, Carter?" came the voice; and this time it was unmistakably the voice of Peyton Boynton.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is," replied Nick slowly, "although I can hardly believe it. How did you get here, Boynton?"

"The same way you did, I suppose, although I think I was brought here first. I think we came directly here from the bank, but I'm not sure."

"How is it that you are not sure about it?"

"Well, you see, when we left the bank we entered a hack. Hawkins had telephoned for it. We were supposed to be going to the Fifth Avenue to see Colonel Seelover."

"I know the rest. The two of them attacked you when they got you inside the hack."

"Yes. Young Moore—he is as strong as a bull—seized me and held me while Hawkins chloroformed me. That is the last I remember except that I have been so sick I thought I would die since the effects of that chloroform wore off."

"You don't remember when I was brought here, eh?"

"No; I didn't know that anybody was there at all until you coughed just now. How did they get you?"

"Ran me down with horses," replied the detective grimly. "Are you tied, Boynton?"

"No; I am chained; chained to a post like an animal."

"So am I."

"Look here, Carter, what do you suppose they intend to accomplish by this sort of proceeding?"

"I'll give it up."

"It is morning, isn't it?"

"Yes; early morning."

"I'll be missed as soon as the bank opens."

"Hawkins will see to it that you are not missed; and if he can find a way to do it he will strip the bank, too."

"He won't be able to do that—unless he can forge my signature."

"There is a possibility that they may come here to make terms with us," said the detective. "You see, they have stripped me of my disguise, and they probably know now who I am; or at least, they have made a pretty close guess."

"Have you any idea where we are, Carter?"

"I should say, on a chance, that we are in a fix."

"Oh, quit it. This is no time for joking! Where do you really suppose we are?"

"I should say, in a warehouse near one of the rivers. Of course, I have no idea which one."

"But I have!" exclaimed Boynton.

"How so? How is that?"

"I happen to know that Hawkins used to own a warehouse—an old thing half-fallen into decay. It is over in Brooklyn; in the Bay Ridge section. That is where we are, as sure as you are alive."

"Very probably."

"You don't suppose that they intend to make this a permanent thing, do you?"

"Make what a permanent thing?"

"This abduction; eh?"

"Do you want me to tell you what I do think, Boynton?"

"Yes."

"Have you got the nerve to stand it?"

"Try me."

"Very well. The fact that we are chained as we are to these posts; the fact that we are not gagged; the fact that our hands and feet are left free, and the fact that we are permitted to talk together all we please, leads to but one conclusion on my part."

"And that is—what?"

"That we are in some place where we might shout ourselves voiceless without being heard—and that they have no idea of returning to us at all."

"Eh? What is that? What do you mean?"

"After a little we will begin to get hungry. Then we will be thirsty, and the thirst will become so intense that we will forget our hunger; and then——"

"My God! You don't mean that they intend to starve us, do you?"

"That is only an impression, but it is what I think from the appearance of things."

"Heavens!"

"All the same, I don't think we will remain here long enough to starve."

Nick could hear the rattling of the chain which held Boynton a prisoner, and after a moment the banker muttered:

"One might as well try to break the cable of a man-of-war as this chain."

"Exactly," replied the detective. "There is no use wasting your strength upon it."

"And I haven't so much as a pin with which to file it."

"Nor I—but I have something else, Boynton."

"What? what?"

"I have two assistants somewhere outside who had orders yesterday not to lose sight of Hawkins and Moore. Chick and Patsy. I think they will succeed in finding us—before we can starve to death."

"That is reassuring, certainly."

"Besides that, I have something up my sleeve."

"What is that?"

"Two revolvers, with five shots each."

"Much good they will do you here!" with fine scorn.

"Yes; they are about as useful at the present moment as a bank-account would be at the north pole. I say, Boynton!"

"Well?"

"If you have a mind to keep quiet for a few moments, I am going to have a look at this big timber to which I am fastened. I have pulled against it two or three times, and it shakes. I shouldn't wonder if it is rotten. Didn't you say that Hawkins' warehouse had fallen into decay?"

"I did."

"Then hold your whist for awhile till I look about me a bit."

It had grown considerably lighter while they were talking, and now the detective could see about him fairly well; but he peered up above him toward the roof of the building in vain. He could see nothing at all there.

Nevertheless, when he seized upon the timber to which he was chained, and shook it in his grasp, it responded tremblingly, although a careful examination of it disclosed the fact that it was perfectly sound.

"That being the case," the detective told himself, "it follows that it must be loose at the top. Othewise it would not shake so. Now, I wonder if I could shin up that thing and carry this heavy chain with me?"

He called out to Boynton again then, and told him what he was about to do.

"I may have my trouble for my pains," he said, "but it is worth trying."

"Suppose it is loose at the top," asked Boynton, "what good will that do you?"

"Heaps! I shall simply pass the loop of the chain over the top in that case, and then slide down to the floor again."

"That won't free you from the chain."

"No; but it will free me from the post."

The chain was an exceptionally heavy one. It had evidently once been used as a rudder-chain aboard of a steam-vessel; and taking the two loops into consideration there was about ten feet of it which the detective had to carry with him in his climb to the top of the timber.

Fortunately it had been wound loosely around the post, and there was therefore no difficulty in sliding it upward as he proceeded with the climbing; and having taken all this into consideration, the detective removed his shoes and began his effort.

Nick Carter never refers to that climb up the post in the warehouse without a frown.

He has said many times that he never underwent a more nerve-racking trial than that was.

His method was to climb as far as he could go, and hold the chain, and then to hang on and rest until he got his breath.

And thus, inch by inch and foot by foot, he made his way to the top—to discover, as he had expected he would, that the upper end of the timber was loose and unattached, and that he had only to lift the loop of the chain over it to be at least half free.

It did not take him long to reach the bottom after that was done, and then his first act was to lie down on the floor at full length and to remain there until he was rested.

But after a time he rose again, and being now recovered from the effects of his exertions, he lifted the chain in his hands and crossed over to Boynton.

"The next thing, Boynton," he said, "is to free myself

from this impedimenta, and then to find a means of freeing you. Do you know anything about the interior of this old warehouse? Eh?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, I need not tell you to remain where you are till I return, but be as patient as you can. I'm going to look about me, and I won't be gone very long. There must be something besides rats and chains and posts in this ramshackle old building; and if there is, I am going to find it."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOOTING OF A BANK.

No person not having been inside an empty, deserted warehouse, can conceive of the utter desolation of such a place.

Where rats and mice, and the wind have held sway for long, there enters a sense of loneliness which is all-pervading.

And again, warehouses, as a class, are almost windowless. True, there are always a few windows situated far up out of the reach of everything; and they are placed there merely to afford light enough to work by.

Through this desolated building with its rotting floors and its time-worn timbers, the detective made his way until at last he found a flight of stairs, half demolished.

Despite the chain which he was obliged to carry, Nick made his way to the ground floor, and thence on through another part of the building until at last—at last, he found what he most desired—an abandoned tool-shop.

But there was an old forge there, and on a block beside it was an anvil, broken in half, but with one of the halves still fast to the block; and there was an iron sledge with a broken handle; and by kicking around among the dèbris on the floor Nick upturned two cold chisels.

The rest was easy, of course.

With the sledge and the cold chisel the detective was not a long time in freeing himself from the chain; and then with his tools in his grasp he hurried back to Peyton Boynton, who was awaiting him, filled with impatience.

Ten minutes later the two men clasped hands and laughed into each other's eyes, well pleased that they were free again, and that after all it was not fated that they should remain chained in that old warehouse to starve.

"And now what?" asked Boynton, after a moment.

"If you could give me some idea of the time," replied Nick, "I might answer that question. As for me, your good friend Hawkins and his associate have taken my watch, my money, and everything else that I possessed—save only these;" and with a quick motion he threw the two revolvers into his hands just to show Boynton how it was done.

"Wonderful!" said the banker.

"It is rather wonderful that they did not discover the fact that I had them. However, it is not likely that we shall need them—unless we should happen to meet Hawkins on the way out."

"You don't think that is likely, do you?"

"No; I do not. But I will tell you what I *do* regard as very likely."

"What?"

"That between the two of them they have hatched up some scheme for robbing your bank. I don't know what it is or how they will go about it, but as a tout at a horse-race would say, 'I've got a hunch' that that is just about what they figure on doing to-night."

"Then we must be on hand to prevent it."

"We certainly will, Boynton. Our move now is to get out of here, to find a conveyance of some kind, and to have ourselves driven to my home just as soon as possible. Come."

He led the way back again to the stairs, and it did not take them long to break their way out of the building, and thence to find a trolley-car, which carried them to Brooklyn Bridge.

It was noon when they arrived at Nick Carter's house, and the two had barely finished changing their clothing and eating abundantly, when Patsy arrived at the house.

"Well," said Nick, "you and Chick are a fine pair! Mr. Boynton and I might have been cold in death by this time. Didn't you know that Hawkins and Moore captured both of us last night, and that we have been prisoners in an old warehouse over in Brooklyn ever since?"

"No, sir," replied Patsy. "It wasn't Hawkins, and it wasn't Moore; but it might have been some of their men. Chick and I have discovered to-day that there are four men here with them, from the Klondike. They are the ones who captured you—if you were really captured."

"Really captured! I like that. But never mind now. We are free. We escaped all the same, and are all right. Tell me what you know, Patsy."

"Chick sent me here to report to you, thinking that you would show up here to-day. He was afraid that something had happened to Mr. Boynton, and thought you ought to know it."

"Something did happen to him. But go on."

"Hawkins called a special meeting of the directors of the Bank of the Klondike this morning soon after the bank opened. At that meeting he handed in the resignation of Mr. Boynton as president, and had himself elected president in place of him. Then he deposed two of the old directors, and had Moore and one of his other men elected in their places, so that now he controls the board. Chick has it from the cashier."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Boynton, "I must go to the bank at once."

"Wait," said Nick, putting out his hand. "Wait and hear the rest of Patsy's story."

"The cashier told Chick," continued Patsy, "that he believed there was some deviltry afoot. He thinks that Hawkins and Moore mean to rob the bank of all the available funds to-night, and then skip out somewhere. He is sure that Hawkins has gotten himself into some terrible trouble in the Klondike, and that he has got to disappear from New York as well."

"Well, what more?"

"Hawkins has made a point of calling for a meeting of the directors after banking hours this afternoon, and he has already notified the bookkeepers and the clerks that they can leave for their homes to-day as soon as the bank closes. He gives as an excuse that a force of expert accountants are coming in to go over the books—but the cashier doesn't believe that."

"Nor do I," said Boynton.

"The cashier says," continued Patsy, "that he believes that Hawkins and Moore intend to loot the bank of everything it contains that is negotiable, as soon as the doors are closed this afternoon. He would have gone to headquarters and complained if there were anything upon which to build a complaint; but in the absence of Mr. Boynton, everything on its face has the appearance of regularity, and he knows that the police would refuse to interfere."

"The police could not do otherwise," said Nick; "but *we can!*"

"Let us do so at once," pleaded the deposed president.

"Wait, Boynton—wait. Patsy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to go to Judge Markam at once and tell him I want a blanket-warrant for the arrest of Jacob Hawkins, Braxton Moore, and others concerned with them in robbery and in a conspiracy to defraud. Tell him it is for me, and that we can fill in the particulars later. He will give it to you. Then go back to Chick, and both of you meet Mr. Boynton and me at the Savarin, at a quarter to three. Will you do all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And manage, if you can, to get a word to Mr. Grill, the cashier, of what is in the wind; but tell him that he is to keep perfectly mum; that he is not on any account to say a word or to offer any objection to what is going on; and also—and this is important—that he is to instruct the watchman at the bank to admit us at exactly a quarter past three. He can best do that by pretending to lock the door and at the same time leaving it unlocked so we can enter without hindrance. That is all. Skip!"

* * * * * * *

3:15 P. M.

Nick Carter followed by Chick, Patsy, Ten-Ichi, and Peyton Boynton walked rapidly down Wall Street and ascended the steps to the door of the Bank of the Klondike.

The detective was in advance of the others, and he mounted the steps quickly, turned the knob on the door, found that it had been left unlocked as he had requested, and opening it he stepped inside, closely followed by the others.

There was not a clerk inside.

The watchman, who had so perfectly obeyed instructions, stood at the door, and he did not even turn his head when Nick and his companions entered.

Mr. Grill, who had been waiting just outside, followed them in.

They entered silently, and paused for a moment.

The murmur of voices could be heard from the president's and directors' rooms at the rear of the corridor, and thither, after a second or two, the detective led the way.

For an instant more he paused just outside the glass door—and then he pushed it boldly open, and entered.

There are a good many similes which might be mentioned as like unto the effect produced by that entrance, but there is not one that would do it justice.

There were seven men there—Hawkins, Moore, their followers from the Klondike, and one other who had long been a director of the bank, but who had ever been a puppet in the hands of Jacob Hawkins—and these seven leaped to their feet as with one accord—and five of the seven drew revolvers.

It was plainly to be seen that they were desperate, and that they instantly realized that they were caught red-handed—with the goods on.

But Nick Carter stood calmly in front of them with his own revolvers leveled, one at Hawkins and the other at Moore, and there was a smile of utter contempt on his face, as he said coolly:

"Hands up, gentlemen! The game is played out, and you lose!"

It is a remarkable thing that not a shot was fired in that room.

The demeanor of Nick Carter awed the conspirators and robbers into silence and fear; and then, when the door opened a second time, and five blue-coated policemen entered the room, for Nick had arranged that they should be on hand at the right moment, there was no sign of further resistance. All seven of the men submitted quietly, and they were speedily taken away to be locked up in cells.

Later in the evening, when Nick Carter and Boynton were traveling up-town together, Nick called the attention of the banker to an item in the evening paper. It announced the destruction by fire of an old warehouse in Brooklyn, formerly owned by one Jacob Hawkins.

"That is what would have been our fate, Boynton," he said smilingly. "Hawkins meant to roast us to death and leave no trace whatever of what had become of us."

THE END.

The next issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 496, will contain "The Bad Man of Nome; or, Nick Carter's Hunt in Alaska."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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No.
150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.

MEDAL LIBRARY

No.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
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296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
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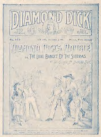

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